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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000801

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SUBJECT: DRC ASSUMING SADC CHAIRMANSHIP

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Garvelink for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: The GDRC lead for SADC issues, Minister for International and Regional Cooperation Raymond Tshibanda, told the Ambassador August 27 that the DRC hoped to focus on development and economic issues during its upcoming SADC Chairmanship. Tshibanda voiced optimism that political conflicts in Zimbabwe and Madagascar were moving towards acceptable resolutions, although Zimbabwe remained fragile. We believe the GDRC will operate primarily in a reactive mode, preferring a low-key chairmanship. The DRC has conflicting attitudes towards Zimbabwe: there are still strong business and sentimental connections with ZANU-PF stemming from Zimbabwe's support for the DRC in its war against Rwanda; but President Kabila and other DRC decision-makers understand that Mugabe is an embarrassment for the region and the continent. Diplomatic efforts should concentrate on encouraging deeper DRC integration into southern Africa's political and economic institutions. End summary.

#### DRC Priorities For SADC

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12. (C) During an August 27 meeting with the Ambassador, Minister for International and Regional Cooperation Raymond Tshibanda, whose ministry has the GDRC lead for SADC issues, said that the September 7-8 SADC summit would establish a roadmap for the organization to follow for the coming year. Tshibanda acknowledged that SADC had primarily wrestled with political strife (Zimbabwe and Madagascar) and regional conflicts (DRC) over the past year. However, the main thrust of the organization should be to improve the quality of life for the region's citizens through increased trade, enhanced environmental protection, orderly migration, better provision of energy, and improved infrastructure. Tshibanda offered up the example of the proposed development of the DRC's Inga II dam as a vehicle to supply southern Africa with more energy.

13. (C) According to Tshibanda, the political impasses in Zimbabwe and Madagascar had improved. Madagascar appeared to be moving steadily towards a return to institutional normalcy. Regarding Zimbabwe, Tshibanda said he "was confident we will see a change soon." South African President Zuma will visit Harare before coming to Kinshasa, according to Tshibanda, and he will then brief SADC on his meetings.

14. (C) Because of the relative calm on the political front, SADC could now devote more time to economic and development issues. Tshibanda listed two areas for specific focus: the establishment of a customs union for SADC and increased attention to agricultural development/food security. Tshibanda said that some SADC countries possessed excellent technical know-how in agricultural production, but they

lacked arable land. Other countries had abundant land, but they lacked the technology to increase production.

The GDRC Approach: Low-Key

15. (C) The DRC's assumption of the SADC Chairmanship is an important moment for the country in general, and for President Kabila in specific. The GDRC approach to its chairmanship will probably reflect the characteristics of Kabila: low-key and inherently hesitant. The GDRC will prefer a reactive mode on the great majority of issues, hoping to carry on without a major crisis unfolding in a SADC member state during its tenure. On most issues, the GDRC will look to South Africa and, to a lesser extent, Angola, for direction. Kabila tends to disdain summits -- he was a no-show at the AU Summit this year and he will again not travel to the UNGA -- and he often refuses to see senior-level visitors from other governments.

16. (C) The issue of Zimbabwe is conflicting for the DRC. There are still significant business and sentimental ties to ZANU-PF, left over from Zimbabwe's support for Kinshasa in its conflicts with Rwanda and Uganda. However, Kabila and other DRC decision-makers clearly understand that Mugabe is an embarrassment to SADC and the African continent. Therefore, the DRC will probably tread lightly on Zimbabwe, preferring to let Pretoria take the lead, but maintaining a high level of interest. The GDRC will undoubtedly work to garner SADC support to cement the improving security situation in Eastern DRC, perhaps seeking greater SADC

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engagement in anti-LRA efforts.

SADC Important Symbolically for the DRC

17. (C) While the SADC Chairmanship will be an important period for the GDRC, SADC is only one of the many regional organizations to which the DRC belongs. Straddling southern Africa and clearly a central African land mass, the DRC prefers to keep its options open in both regions. In addition to SADC, the DRC is a member of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Economic Community of Central African States (CEEAC), the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), and the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries (CEPGL). A young democracy emerging from a decade of war and three decades of dictatorship, the DRC is still trying to find its way through the region's "alphabet soup" of organizations, testing each for its usefulness to promote DRC interests.

Anchoring the GDRC in a Southern Africa Orbit

18. (C) Because of its geographical size, the DRC will always have national interests that go beyond SADC's mandate. Nevertheless, anchoring the GDRC more firmly in southern Africa should help the country achieve greater economic and political stability. Relations with the South African Government (SAG) are generally good. However, there is a residual resentment by many DRC leaders at what they perceived as an SAG bias towards Rwanda and even implicit support for Kigali in recent conflicts. In this vein, South African advice is welcome and respected, but thoroughly scrutinized.

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